

## Arc Studios News November 2020

**A Conversation with  
Rachel Leibman  
Arc Studio #203  
By Sherri Cornett**



Rachel Leibman's art is as surprising and original as when I first talked with her in 2018. This month we can see her exciting new work in *Uncommon Threads*, an exhibition in the Project Gallery at Arc, which she curated with works by other artists.

**SHERRI:** First, Rachel, it is heartwarming to see the image of your smiling face in front of your new work. We certainly need both – joy and creativity – in these isolated times. Would you tell me about your current processes?

**RACHEL:** Yes. For many years I created collages almost exclusively. But, in the last few years, I have branched out to other mixed media art, including textiles, tapestries and sculptures from fabric, vintage watch parts, buttons, glass pipettes, beads, shells and more.

**SC:** Have you been able to continue working on your art during the pandemic?

**RL:** At the beginning of the shutdown, my family and I hunkered down and I was unable to make art. As the weeks wore on, panic subsided and boredom set in, but I still didn't feel comfortable going to my studio. Luckily, I really don't have trouble staying motivated. I came to art later in life and it still thrills me. It's the one thing that has made this pandemic and political period bearable.

Isolating in my house had its benefits. It turned me into a pioneer woman for a period of time! I started working with what I could do at home, which meant sewing and experiments in dyeing material.

**SC:** Tell me more!

**RL:** I collected plants and spices from my kitchen, backyard and in neighborhood parks and then boiled them in large, smelly dye baths on my kitchen stovetop — my family was especially horrified by the red cabbage concoctions! My biggest success during that period was being able to get a consistent blue color when dyeing with the cabbage. It made me ridiculously happy!

At home, my work became more intimate and modest. I made several small quilts with tie-dyed silk remnants. After a few months I ventured back to my studio at Arc. I feel safe there now and have returned to making larger and more ambitious tapestries and sculptures from watch parts and buttons.

**SC:** So, that leads us to your upcoming show, *Uncommon Threads*.

**RL:** As the name implies, it features textile artists. However, rather than using fiber, these artists create their textiles from non-traditional materials such as wire, video tape, plastic bags, inner tubes and moth cocoons and . . . we all use recycled objects as our source materials.

**SC:** The textures, dimensions and variations in this show must be intriguing!

**RL:** Yes, they are! The artists have shaped their materials into sculptures and tapestries and, in the process, have woven stories, both personal and universal . . . of family, gender, society, and the environment. It is really special. I love curating because it allows me to showcase art that excites me and to promote artists who should have more recognition.

**SC:** Previously, we talked about how viewers have two layers of experience with your work . . . from afar and then being brought in closer to examine the details. With social distancing and limits to public gatherings, has there been any difference in the way you present your new work?

**RL:** It's not been easy. My artwork really needs to be seen in person. It loses so much of its impact on the small screen. But I'm doing what I have to – virtual open studios, zoom artist talks, online art auctions, and art shows with no openings.

I get a lot of inspiration for my artwork when I travel, especially overseas. I miss that. I miss a lot of things . . . especially hugging my friends. I can't wait to get back to germ spreading days! But, I'm not going to rush it!

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